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Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for hosting the July 27 briefing on Rwanda. At the end of that briefing and in a subsequent letter, you asked Assistant Secretary Moose about lessons the United States and the international community might learn from the Rwanda tragedy.

The United States has long been concerned with the effects of traditional ethnic rivalries on politics in Burundi and Rwanda and has led efforts to prevent conflict by encouraging the parties to settle on a formula for sharing power in Rwanda. . We were active observers at the year-long Rwandan peace process -- a process which led to the August 4, 1993 peace accord between the government of Rwanda (GOR) and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF). We contributed one million dollars to support those peace talks and help the Organization of African Unity (OAU) fund cease-fire monitors. We supported the deployment of UN peacekeepers in Rwanda (UNAMIR) when the GOR and RPF signed the August 4 Arusha accords. We contributed to the peace process in the hope that there would be reconciliation in Rwanda.

One could not have anticipated the magnitude of carnage that followed the April 6 deaths of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in a plane crash. The scale and viciousness of the violence was unimaginable and unprecedented. UN peacekeeping troops -- on the ground to monitor the implementation of the Arusha accords -- were attacked. Ten peacekeepers were killed in the initial days of fighting. The lightly armed UN contingent had neither the size nor the mandate to defend innocent victims in the early stages of the civil conflict. Under these circumstances, we felt an obligation to support the UN's decision to withdraw the bulk of these forces for their own safety.

Before and during the crisis, we spoke, directly and through other channels, with GOR and RPF officials in Washington and abroad, by phone and in person. We consistently pushed for an immediate end to the killing, a cease-fire, resumption of peace talks and cooperation with relief efforts. We encouraged the OAU, other regional states

The Honorable
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE Chairman,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
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and our European allies to join us in this effort. We dispatched Assistant Secretary Shattuck and U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda, David Rawson, to the region to continue these efforts. We pushed for the April 30 UNSC statement demanding that the GOR and the RPF take measures to prevent attacks on civilians and for the arms embargo against Rwanda.

What could the United States and the international community have done differently? At the time of the plane crash, the United States and the international community were engaged in an all out effort to facilitate implementation of the Arusha accords having deployed 2500 UN peacekeepers and put concerted diplomatic pressure on the Rwandans to install the transition institutions. Immediate, widespread conflict erupted in Rwanda after the plane crash. It is unreasonable to expect the UN, with its political, financial and logistical constraints, to interject troops in the middle of a violent civil war. The task of organizing, equipping and deploying an international force in response to the Rwandese crisis has proven more difficult and time-consuming than the U.N. and others had anticipated. This has prompted observers, including some in Congress, to ask whether there is a need to examine alternative peacekeeping mechanisms.

On June 24, with UN Security Council approval, the French launched a temporary humanitarian military operation to help protect threatened Hutu populations in Rwanda, pending UNAMIR expansion. The French have long-standing cultural and politico-economic ties with Rwanda. Their presence in Rwanda has prevented further bloodshed and refugee flight.

While the situations in Somalia and Rwanda are not comparable, the United States government's policies and actions towards Rwanda since April 6 no doubt were affected by problems the U.S. military encountered as participants in the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), and the restrictions Congress imposed on our participation in UNOSOM. President Clinton's May 1994 Decision Directive (PDD) 25 also guided our policy towards Rwanda. We also were not convinced that military intervention in the midst of civil war would have been effective or supported by Congress, even if countries had been prepared to make forces available for such an intervention.

The President ordered military personnel to the region to assist the UN High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) relief efforts. The UNHCR was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the influx of some one million people into Zaire over a 72 hour period. The U.S. military, with its lift and logistical abilities, quickly answered the call. No other military force in the world could have acted as quickly or as effectively as the U.S. military did.

If we accept that the U.S. military is the only organization that can rapidly provide logistics and materiel and if we expect the U.S. military to perform more of these missions, then Congress must provide adequate funding and support for U.S. military humanitarian missions. Although the President rapidly forwarded his FY 1994 urgent supplemental request for the Defense Department's assistance to Rwandan refugees, the House and Senate have not yet met in conference on the FY 95 Defense Appropriations Bill. Also, the Senate version of this bill significantly restricts U.S. military participation in the Rwandan humanitarian crisis.

If we are to expect the UN, OAU and other multilateral organizations to prevent and rapidly respond to future humanitarian crises, we must help strengthen these bodies. Specific recommendations for strengthening the UN are listed in PDD 25. The Administration is moving forward, under the direction of PDD 25, with a number of recommendations to improve UN peacekeeping. Other studies, such as the one done for the Stimson Center, also made a number of recommendations that we are pursuing. We also plan to continue supporting the OAU's efforts to enhance its conflict resolution capabilities. We are pleased that the Congress approved the Administration's request for funding to support this effort in the FY95 Foreign Operations Appropriation.

Our military and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development continue assisting the Rwandese refugees and the internally displaced in Rwanda. The State Department continues seeking reconciliation in Rwanda, international prosecution of war crimes, and promotion of conditions which will permit the safe return of all refugees to Rwanda.

We cannot predict every disaster in Africa or the magnitude of that disaster. Certainly, we can improve upon existing capabilities to manage conflict. We need your support to do so. We look forward to a continuing dialogue with you on crisis prevention and management.

I hope this information will be helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need more information.

Sincerely,

Wendy R. Sherman
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs

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